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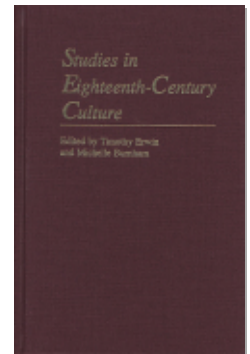
Beauty and the Beast: Animals in the Visual and Material  
Culture of the Toilette

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# Beauty and the Beast: Animals in the Visual and Material Culture of the Toilette

KIMBERLY CHRISMAN-CAMPBELL

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the toilette evolved from a single object, the *petit toile* that covered the dressing table, to a set of objects, and from a set of objects to a daily ritual, synonymous with the morning hours.<sup>1</sup> The highly codified rites of the toilette were re-enacted over and over again in eighteenth-century art, not only by beautiful women, but also by monkeys and butterflies.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, animals played a central role in the visual and material culture of the toilette. Both exotic and domestic creatures were depicted as frequent witnesses to—and sometimes anthropomorphic participants in—the toilette. Animals lurk in corners and chairs and under tables in so many toilette scenes that they cannot be dismissed as mere props or accessories; the symbiotic connection between beauty and the beast demands further investigation.

Although ostensibly private, the toilette was, in practice, extremely public. Louis XIV and his mother, Anne of Austria, had instituted the custom of dressing—or, rather, being dressed—in front of privileged courtiers.<sup>3</sup> This royal ritual was imitated by women (and men) of the nobility and *haute bourgeoisie*, who transformed it from an exercise in political power and proximity into a domestic celebration of taste and sociability, one frequently depicted in genre scenes and portraits. Not only the carefully choreographed event itself, but its elegant accoutrements, were calculated to impress and entice.

Just as the toilette transitioned from a royal to a bourgeois pastime, so did keeping pets. As Glynis Ridley has observed, “the eighteenth century was a time not only of rapid expansion of the natural world but also of rapidly changing relationships between human and non-human animals.”<sup>4</sup> New species were being discovered and classified at an unprecedented rate; once-exotic animals were becoming familiar sights in Europe. It has been well documented—notably by Louise E. Robbins—that pets of all kinds grew more common in homes at all levels of French society during the eighteenth century: dogs, cats, monkeys, parrots, cockatoos, canaries, finches, and, occasionally, small rodents.<sup>5</sup> Although there were a number of male pet owners, in art and literature pets were associated with women and girls almost exclusively. Robbins attributes this to “the romantic and erotic connotations aroused by the close physical and emotional bonds between owner and animal,” and argues that at a time when wealth was beginning to replace birth in determining social status, pets—and especially exotic pets—were a desirable form of conspicuous consumption.<sup>6</sup>

The same can be said of the toilette. Although men and women alike held toilettes attended by friends, family members, clergymen, servants, and tradesmen, it was the female toilette that became a recurring theme in French art and print culture. Like female pet ownership, the female toilette carried connotations both erotic and economic. The taste for toilette scenes spanned history painting, genre scenes, and portraits, combining the ancient *vanitas* tradition with the ultramodern *tableau de mode*. Pets lent these scenes credibility and visual interest, but they also functioned as convenient symbols, whether of status, sexuality, exoticism, or human foibles. Indeed, artists were attracted to their human characteristics as much as their distinctively bestial colors and textures.

Birds—especially parrots—flock to toilette scenes. Parrots were not only rare, beautiful, and expensive, but they could mimic human speech, which made them good companions as well as handy human surrogates in art. The parrot’s splendid plumage came at a price; the gaudier the parrot, the more expensive it was.<sup>7</sup> However, like mirrors and burning candles, parrots were traditional emblems of mortality in addition to being a standard components of toilette tables, providing a reminder of the fleeting nature of beauty and the futility of attempting to mask the ravages of time. Equally exotic if less colorful and loquacious, the cockatoo is distinguished by its crest of curled feathers, which can be raised or lowered at will. In François Boucher’s painting *Le Matin: La Dame à sa Toilette* (now lost, it survives as an engraving by Gilles-Edmé Petit), the lady’s posture—and curls—are echoed in the position and plumage of the cockatoo perched on the back of her chair. (fig. 1) A beautiful bird was a natural analogue

to a beautiful woman, combining the exotic with the erotic.<sup>8</sup> In a satirical sense, however, it could also suggest that the woman was flighty or bird-brained, or, at the very least, preoccupied with her plumage.

From the Old Testament onwards, birds have been characterized as spies, watching from above and reporting on bad behavior.<sup>9</sup> In toilette scenes, this suggestion of surveillance implicates the male viewer. In *Sa taille est ravissante* by P.-A. Baudoin, a dove perched atop the toilette mirror pointedly ogles the lady as she exposes her ravishing bosom, pushing the scene from mere vanity into voyeurism.<sup>10</sup> But as Morag Martin has pointed out, the eighteenth-century toilette scene is largely a tease—a “reversal of the strip show.”<sup>11</sup> Although it purports to show the natural, unadorned woman, in most cases her coiffure and makeup are already in place, and she is fully covered, if not fully dressed; she simply needs to apply the finishing touches, like a cap, a ribbon, a garter, or, a face patch. It is the performance of taste and decorum encoded in a woman’s choice and graceful application of fashions and cosmetics—and in her elegant toilette equipment—that seduces her beholders. If Louis-Sébastien Mercier is to be believed, women really did perform two toilettes: the first in private, and the second for show, once she had made herself presentable.<sup>12</sup>

If not the male gaze, the exotic parrot or cockatoo may stand in for a bird of another feather. Explicitly or implicitly, eighteenth-century toilette scenes referenced the most famous toilette of antiquity, the toilette of Venus. Portraits of women as Venus allowed for “a bold display of the sitter’s mostly naked charms” as well as making a “flattering allusion” to the sitter’s likeness to the goddess of love.<sup>13</sup> The traditional emblems of Venus—roses and pearls—were equally at home on the toilette table; it did not require a flight of fancy on the part of the viewer to read a parrot or cockatoo as a dove. Boucher painted the definitive eighteenth-century version of the toilette of Venus in 1751 for Madame de Pompadour’s bathroom at Bellevue. (fig. 2) Although not a portrait, the reference to Pompadour was obvious; Louis XV’s mistress had played the title role in *La Toilette de Vénus, ou le Matin*, a ballet performed at Versailles in 1750, and her own morning toilette was famously the site of intellectual conversation and political intrigue.<sup>14</sup> (Boucher’s Venus also wears pompons, Pompadour’s namesake hair ornaments.) *The Toilet of Venus* is a genre painting elevated to the status of history painting; like the contemporary toilette scenes discussed below, it exudes abundance, luxury, and exoticism, and assembles a large cast of characters to assist at the toilette, including a pair of doves—one of them fettered or, perhaps, dressed with a blue ribbon.

Along with other animals, birds participated in the toilette as well as observing it. Under the heading of “Plumassier panachier,” the



**Figure 1.** Gilles-Edmé Petit after François Boucher, *Le Matin: La Dame à sa Toilette*, c. 1734, engraving, 31.5 x 21.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 53.600.1042.



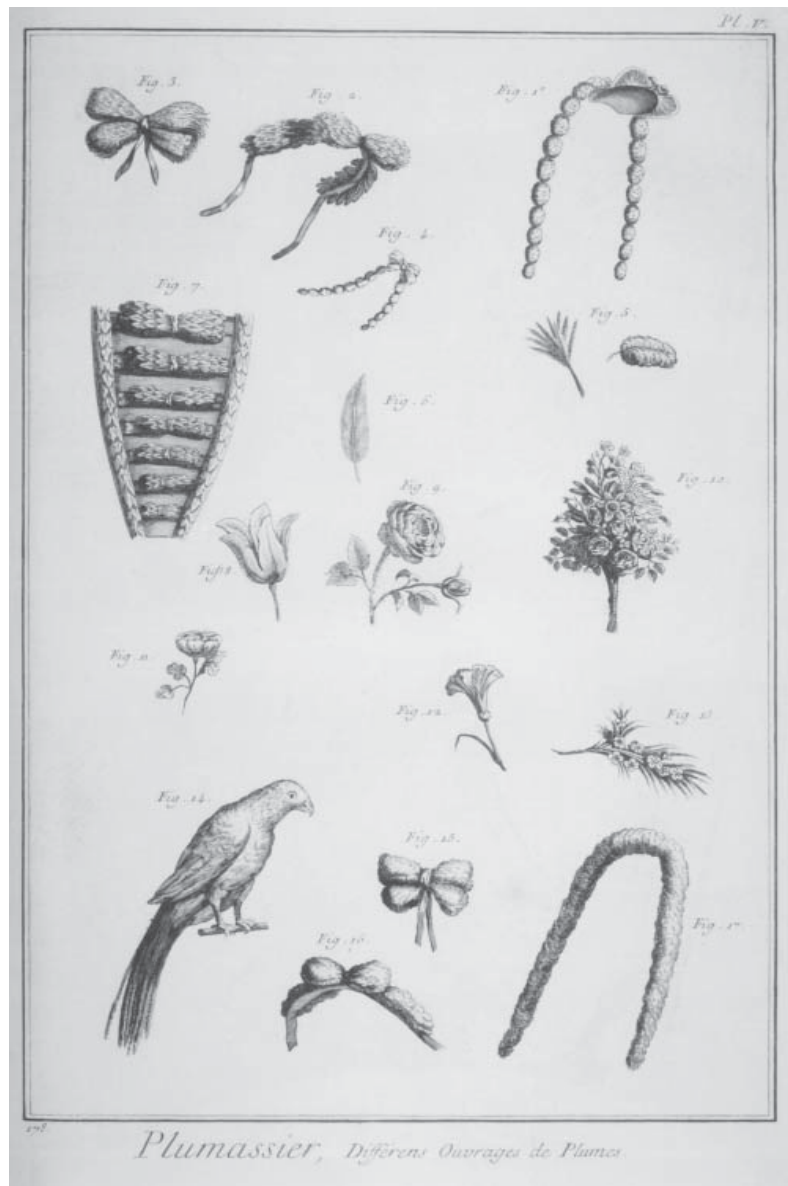
**Figure 2.** François Boucher, *The Toilet of Venus*, 1751, oil on canvas, 108.3 x 85.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 20.155.9.

*Encyclopédie* illustrated the wide variety of female costume accessories that could be fashioned out of feathers, including bows, lappets, tippets, fontages, chokers, artificial flowers, and muffs. (fig. 3) The irony of the parallel practices of women keeping birds and wearing them was not lost on eighteenth-century artists. Fashion plates and portraits depicted women with exuberant plumage nuzzling their equally colorful pet parrots.<sup>15</sup> (fig. 4) The elaborate headdresses called *poufs* that first became fashionable in France in 1774 often incorporated feathers, and sometimes entire birds. The trend-setting duchesse de Chartres launched the fashion with a *pouf* depicting her infant son and his nurse, her pet parrot, and her black servant boy, all nestled in a towering edifice of pomaded hair.<sup>16</sup> The baronne d'Oberkirch described the *poufas* "une coiffure dans laquelle on introduisait les personnes ou les choses qu'on préférait. Ainsi le portrait de sa fille, de sa mère, l'image de son serin, de son chien, etc, tout cela garni des cheveux de son père ou d'un ami de coeur. C'était incroyable d'extravagance."<sup>17</sup> These seemingly incongruous tonsorial groupings of family members, pets, and servants had important precedents in toilette scenes.

Monkeys, like parrots, were always imported; with a handful of documented exceptions, they were not successfully bred in Europe in the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Yet in the fifteenth volume of his *Histoire Naturelle*, published in 1767, the comte de Buffon illustrated a capuchin monkey in what had become his natural habitat: not the jungle, but a lady's boudoir, with a toilette table visible in the background. (fig. 5) The monkey has broken his chain, unwound a ball of string, and shattered a small pitcher in a visual parody of the toilette. This is not just a satirical fantasy; it was an all too familiar hazard of owning monkeys, who had a reputation for bad behavior. The princesse de Chimay, a lady in waiting to Marie-Antoinette, kept a pet monkey, Almanzor, who once snapped his chain and snuck into her *cabinet de toilette* while she was at the opera. The baronne d'Oberkirch recounted the result in her memoirs:

The princesses' beautiful vermeil dressing table had, for a long time, been the object of his desire. Judge how he made the most of it. It was a massacre of boxes, powder puffs, combs, and hair pins. He opened everything; he spilled all the perfumes, but only after having taken care to cover himself with them. Next he rolled in the powder, looked at himself in the mirror, and apparently satisfied with this transformation, he completed it by applying rouge and face patches, as he had seen done to his mistress; only he put the rouge on his nose, and the patch in the middle of his forehead. That was not all; he made himself a *pouf* with a cuff.





**Figure 3.** Feather Trader, plate showing various feather creations: second series, Engraving from Denis Diderot, Jean Baptiste Le Rond d'Alembert, L'Encyclopedie, 1751-1757 / De Agostini Picture Library / The Bridgeman Art Library. By courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison.





**Figure 4.** Etienne Claude Voysard after Pierre Thomas Leclerc, “Caraco à la polonoise,” *Galerie des Modes*, 28e cahier, pl. dd. 165, 1780, engraving, 35.6 x 24.1 cm, MFA Boston, acc. no. 44.1442.



**Figure 5.** “Saï à gorge blanche,” Buffon et al., *Histoire Naturelle*, vol. 15 (1767), plate 9. Reproduced by courtesy of the Department of Special Collections at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

By this time, the princess had returned home and was in the midst of hosting a dinner party, unaware of the damage until Almanzor leapt on to the dining table, patched and powdered, in the middle of the meal, causing the ladies to run screaming from the table.<sup>19</sup>

This anecdote reads like a parable about the dangers of keeping pets in cages or on chains, a practice that received a great deal of criticism, both moral and scientific. Although some eighteenth-century toilette scenes include a birdcage or an ornate chain, in most cases animals have free reign of the boudoir. A caged bird or a chained dog had a very different meaning, inviting comparisons between the animal and its owner, and implying that the latter was fettered by her jewels, or living as a prisoner in a gilded cage.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, a broken chain or an open cage might signify loss of virginity. Visual parallels between the human world and the animal world were time-honored elements of genre scenes; it was only in the eighteenth century, however, that widespread interest in animal welfare and psychology allowed artists to transmute prevalent critiques of the treatment of animals into commentaries on the human condition.

Whether free or fettered, monkeys (which mimic human behavior) and parrots (which mimic human speech) often served as metaphors for people in eighteenth-century art. In his *Dictionnaire critique*, the satirist Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli defined capuchin monkeys as “little monkeys that people have for show, or because they resemble them.”<sup>21</sup> An entire artistic genre, *singerie*, was predicated on the idea that monkeys—*singes* in French—mimicked or resembled people. Although the identification of monkeys with humans in art dates back to medieval illuminated manuscripts, it reached its zenith in the eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup> The founding of the French East India Company in 1664 opened Europe to Eastern trade and artistic inspiration. Decorative arts in the Asian style—generically termed “*Chinoiserie*”—flourished in the eighteenth century, frequently incorporating pagodas, arabesques, and other exotic motifs and animals. Monkeys invaded tapestries, ceramics, clocks, and even harpsichords. Seventeenth-century Flemish genre scenes by Pieter Brueghel and David Teniers the Younger and his contemporaries cast monkeys in scenes of daily life. Eighteenth-century images of monkeys were usually intended to lampoon human fashion and fashionability; artists like Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and William Hogarth satirically depicted monkeys as painters, musicians, and connoisseurs. In *singeries*, monkeys invariably indulge in the favorite pleasures and pastimes of high society. However, monkeys were also popular pets at the time, prominently on view in the homes and portraits of the elite. Occasionally, they even wore clothes.<sup>23</sup>

The association of humans with monkeys was not just an artistic conceit, but an unassailable scientific principle; in the eighteenth century, “it was long an accepted view that humans were descended from simians, although more recently scientists have determined that both derive from a common ancestor.”<sup>24</sup> Contemporary philosophers and theologians, too, increasingly argued that all kinds of animals possessed a “sensitive principle”—essentially, a soul—that governed their behavior, just as humans did. Implicit in this materialist belief that animals had human qualities was the inverse that “man is only an animal,” in the physician Julien Offran de La Mettrie’s phrase.<sup>25</sup> La Mettrie even speculated that monkeys could be taught to speak. In this context, *singeries* are not just satirical or whimsical images, but visions of an alternative reality.

But monkeys and parrots were more than generic human surrogates in art; specifically, they were metaphors for imitative people or social climbers, who “aped” and “parroted” their betters. To call a person the “*singe*” of someone else was akin to calling them a “copycat.” As Robbins has pointed out, “anxiety about eloquent imposters” was strong in the eighteenth-century. “That fear combined with the prevalence of parrots and monkeys as pets among the fashionable made for convenient analogies between mimicking animals and ... social climbers.”<sup>26</sup> Caraccioli took this a step farther and attributed the invention of the toilette to monkeys, implying that the entire ritual was an exercise in affectation.<sup>27</sup>

Makeup itself was traditionally associated with feminine artifice and deceit. But, as Melissa Hyde has pointed out, in the eighteenth century, cosmetics were “less a matter of gender than of class, lavished almost exclusively on the faces of the nobility—both female and male.”<sup>28</sup> The point of wearing cosmetics in eighteenth century was not to look beautiful or natural, but to look rich. Sumptuary laws—never very effective—were no longer enforced. Cosmetics were widely available, having evolved from traditional home remedies to store-bought products, some priced within reach of the shop girls and servants who increasingly imitated aristocratic modes, including the heavy rouge worn at court.<sup>29</sup> Thanks to the thriving cosmetics trade, beauty could be acquired easily, by anyone. As *L’Espion Chinois* claimed: “Il n’y a rien de plus aisé à Paris que d’avoir la beauté; il suffit d’avoir une tête pour se donner un joli visage.”<sup>30</sup> The social aping and parroting that created so much class anxiety began at the toilette table.

The prominent example of Madame de Pompadour, a commoner whose beauty allowed her access to the king’s bed and confidence, served as a cautionary—or inspirational—tale.<sup>31</sup> From the late 1740s, her morning toilette served as an informal, unofficial court where Pompadour could

advance her political agenda while circumventing royal etiquette; “Pompadour’s toilette became celebrated for the amount of business that the marquise transacted at it.”<sup>32</sup> Just as French women imitated the fashions the royal *maîtresse en titre* wore, they likely used Pompadour’s toilette as a model for their own ambitious social goals. Boucher’s much-altered portrait of Pompadour at her toilette captures the artifice of both eighteenth-century cosmetics and their application: the powdered, curled hair and the unnaturally whitened skin enlivened with bright circles of rouge, daubed on with ornate brushes and powder puffs.<sup>33</sup> In the *Encyclopédie*, Louis de Jaucourt disparaged the practice of wearing rouge but conceded: “Il est depuis assez long-tems parmi nous une des marques du rang ou de la fortune.”<sup>34</sup> As Hyde has pointed out, contemporary critics of Pompadour’s “heavy-handed use of cosmetics” were objecting to her class aspirations rather than her vanity.<sup>35</sup> It is doubly fitting, then, that Gabriel de Saint-Aubin chose to depict Pompadour as a monkey at a toilette table, pomading her private parts (“levres”) in front of the mirror.<sup>36</sup> Both monkeys and cosmetics evoked accusations of ridiculous affectation and social ambition.

In contrast to exotic animals like parrots and monkeys, dogs and cats were seen as useful and dependable rather than frivolous and troublesome. Dogs could act as guard dogs and hunting dogs; cats might earn their keep by chasing away vermin.<sup>37</sup> But dogs and cats came with their own allegorical baggage, signifying sex rather than status. The cat in Boucher’s *La Marchande de modes*—originally titled *Le Matin*—is suggestively placed, occupying the seat of a chair identical to the one occupied by its mistress.<sup>38</sup> If this cat is curiously disengaged from the scene at hand, turning its back on the female figures, it confronts the viewer directly, its mouth slightly open in a suggestive smile. In Boucher’s *Lady Fastening Her Garter*, exotic birds are relegated to the folding Chinese screen, where they provide visual interest and intellectual cachet—and, perhaps, stand in for a male gaze—without drawing accusations of mimicry, or attracting the attention of the kitten playing between the lady’s spread legs.<sup>39</sup> Colin Bailey has called the kitten “a fairly obvious” sexual reference, one in keeping with other sexual imagery in the painting: the open door, the tea table set for two, the roaring fire and phallic fire tongs, and the general disarray and *deshabillé*. “*Chatte*,” of course, has the same double meaning in French that “pussy” has in English, and Nancy K. Miller observes that in this “elegant crotch shot . . . the cat visually foregrounds the pussy hidden behind layers of white petticoats,” much as it does in *La Marchande de modes*.<sup>40</sup>

But the kitten serves as a stand-in not merely for the lady’s sexuality but for the lady herself. It toys with a ball of string trailing from the workbag just



as the lady manipulates her ribbon garter, its legs splayed in a visual echo of its owners'. As in *La Marchand de modes*, the kitten's bold gaze may well foreground the wanton thoughts presumably hidden behind the lady's polite cosmetic mask.<sup>41</sup> The kitten also serves as an emblem of somewhat decadent luxury; although not a particularly exotic pet, it is as fashionable and frivolous a possession as the imported Chinese bric-a-brac crowding the room. Indeed, Alastair Laing has identified the same kitten in two of Boucher's *Chinoiserie* scenes.<sup>42</sup> Because they can see in the dark, cats often figure in allegorical depictions of the sense of sight; like birds, they are natural voyeurs.<sup>43</sup> The curiosity of the cat was proverbial in French as well as English.<sup>44</sup> Together, these last two qualities evoke a peeping Tom scenario, reinforced by the bird-bedecked screen and the portrait peeking over the top. However, the figure in the portrait is female—a lascivious comment, perhaps, on the intimate relationship of the maid and mistress in this private female space.

The dog, a traditional symbol of fidelity, might also express repressed sexual excitement.<sup>45</sup> As Robert Rosenblum has noted, "eighteenth-century artists, ... while ... keenly aware of the way in which animals in general and dogs in particular could fit into the rational patterns designed by their human superiors, nevertheless began to take more and more notice of how these domesticated creatures could stir up memories of a mysterious world of instincts and passions that were perhaps even shared by their human owners."<sup>46</sup> Both sides of this coin can be seen in P.-A. Baudoin's *La Toilette*. (fig. 6) The aggressive slant of the fully-clothed man's sword towards the under-dressed woman's outstretched leg suggests a libertine subtext, as he balances precariously in his *fauteuil* and plucks a spray of flowers from a trunk overflowing with *chiffons*. But the dog at the woman's feet mirrors the posture of her visitor, whose arm is draped over the back of his chair in a curve that echoes the dog's spine, his crossed legs and sword following the angle of the dog's legs. The viewer must question whether this is a portrait of love, lust, or both.

In Jean-Baptiste Greuze's moralizing genre scene *The Broken Mirror*, the toilette becomes a performance of carelessness; the disorder of the young woman's toilette table, hair and clothing betray the confused state of her morals.<sup>47</sup> Here, the yapping dog represents carnal desire unleashed, and draws our attention to the broken mirror signifying the loss of virginity and, perhaps, the consequences of female vanity, embedded in the toilette ritual itself. Above and beyond the perennial critiques of cosmetic artifice, the many hours women spent at the toilette—often in male company—were of grave concern to moralists and *philosophes*, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for they were thought to encourage not only narcissism but gossip, greed, idleness, and lust.



**Figure 6.** Nicolas Ponce after P.-A. Baudoin, *La Toilette*, c. 1771, engraving, 39.6 x 28.1 cm, Hunterian Museum of Art, GLAHA 949.



In France, dogs underwent their own toilette; an Irish visitor to Paris in 1787 was horrified to find that their “little lap-dogs are shorn in a most whimsical manner, and have trinkets and bells for ever jingling about their ears.”<sup>48</sup> The belled collars worn by dogs and cats alike in the mid-eighteenth century closely resembled the fashionable pearl chokers worn by women.<sup>49</sup> The *niche de chien* functioned as a luxurious boudoir in miniature for a dog that was often as well dressed and coiffed as its owner; one can be seen in Sigismond Freudeberg’s *La Marchande de rubans*, in which the dog, wearing an engraved gold collar, is as excited by the ribbon merchant’s visit as its mistress.<sup>50</sup> This wicker *niche* is fairly modest compared to others of the Louis XVI period, which could take the form of an alcove, a miniature theatre, a dome, an aviary, or a chateau, complete with fountain.<sup>51</sup> While their ornaments and environments evoke those of their pampered mistresses, these dogs also function as surrogates for the male viewer, enjoying privileged access to the female body and boudoir.

The male toilette was a different animal altogether, appearing in an almost exclusively satirical context in eighteenth-century art. (One such satire, *The Macarony Dressing Room*, contrasts a macaroni’s high toupet with the splendid crest of a preening cockatoo, pointedly perched on the back of a chair over which a man’s coat has been draped.<sup>52</sup>) The dearth of male toilette scenes may be partly explained by the fact that men did not spend as much time at their toilettes as women did, whether because their clothing and hairstyles (or, properly, wigs) required less effort, or because they preferred to spend their mornings conducting business or else riding or hunting, in imitation of the king. It is also true that, until the 1770s, men of all classes went to barbers’ and wigmakers’ shops to have themselves shaved and powdered, a practice well documented in art and print culture.<sup>53</sup> When men are depicted at their own toilette table, they are usually accompanied by dogs—male hunting dogs, rather than beribboned lapdogs. Like their masters, these dogs are bred for function, not fashion. In “La Petite Toilette” from J.-M. Moreau de Jeune’s *Le Monument du Costume*, a rare non-satirical depiction of a man’s toilette, a man is having his hair curled and powdered at home in the new fashion, surrounded by many of the actors and accoutrements familiar from female toilette scenes. (fig. 7) The dog is one of many active participants in the serious business of dressing. Instead of a cozy *niche de chien*, this dog sleeps on a flat cushion—when he is not helping his master choose a coat, that is.

As stated above, the eighteenth-century toilette was not an intimate, private ritual, but one typically performed before an audience. Thus, its accoutrements were far from quotidian, instead combining luxury, novelty, and exoticism; to dress was to impress. Like exotic pets, exotic toilette



**Figure 7.** Pietro Antonio Martini after Jean-Michel Moreau de Jeune, “La Petite Toilette,” from *Le Monument du Costume*, 1745–97, engraving, 46 x 35.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 33.6.28.

articles signified that one was modern and cosmopolitan as well as rich. In many cases, the animals themselves were inscribed in the material culture of the toilette. The most expensive ingredients of eighteenth-century cosmetics and perfumes were derived from animals, including cochineal, ambergris, civet, and musk; these potions were applied with natural sponges and animal-hair brushes.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, many of the materials used to create high-end toilette articles were animal-based. A surviving thirty-piece toilette set in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum is made from tortoiseshell inlaid with silver.<sup>55</sup> And a French *carré* or square toilette-table box in the J. Paul Getty Museum is veneered with mother-of-pearl and stained and painted horn.<sup>56</sup> The marquetry lid depicts the toilette of Venus, complete with swans and doves; a witty reference to its function as a container for toilette articles. Although shell and horn were used for all sorts of high-end household objects in the eighteenth century, at the toilette table they formed part of a splendid tableau of expensive and exotic luxury goods like lace, porcelain, lacquer, silver, crystal, and vermeil—all reflected in a large mirror, perhaps the most costly item of all.

Mimi Hellman has argued that among the eighteenth-century elite, “objects possessed many of the same surface qualities as the richly clothed bodies of their users.”<sup>57</sup> In toilette scenes, the female body takes on the properties of the toilette table. Ribbons, flowers, feathers, combs, cosmetics, lace, pearls, powder, rouge, and patches migrate from the toilette table to the body and back in a seamless exchange. The linen and lace *toile* is reflected in delicate white *peignoirs*, tied at the neck to reveal triangles of equally delicate white flesh; or exquisite sleeve ruffles (*engageantes*). Likewise, the cats, dogs, parrots, and monkeys who frequently bear witness to their mistresses’ *toilettes* find their hides and feathers appropriated for fur-trimmed cloaks, powder puffs, and hair ornaments. Even when animals are not explicitly depicted in toilette scenes, they are obliquely present.

By the mid-eighteenth century, animal imagery had also infiltrated the language of the toilette. Hairstyles and wigs were named for their resemblance to sleeping dogs, hedgehogs, or pigeon’s wings; the feminine *tête de mouton* or “sheep’s head” was tightly curled and powdered white like a sheep’s fleece. The black silk or velvet patches worn on the face were called *mouches*, or flies, because they were the size of a fly’s wing. (Boucher’s *Lady Fastening Her Garter* wears one, and his *Le Matin* depicts a woman applying patches.) Winged caps were known as *papillons*, or butterflies. In 1781, the *Mémoires secrets* recorded a fad for gowns with long, twisted trains “à queue de singe.”<sup>58</sup> A parrot-shaped faience man’s wigstand in the Musée Adrien Dubouché is a visual pun on *perruque* and *perroquet* or *perruche*.<sup>59</sup>

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, animals begin to disappear from toilette scenes, and from descriptions of daily life in elite households. Mercier wrote in the *Tableau de Paris*: “Le singe, dont les femmes raffoloient, admis à leurs toilettes, appelé sur leurs genoux, a été relégué dans les anti-chambres. La perruche, la levrette, l’épagneul, l’angora, ont obtenu tour-à-tour un rang auprès de l’Abbé, du Magistrat & de l’Officier. Mais ces êtres chéris on tout-à-coup perduc de leur crédit, & les femmes ont pris de petits Negres.”<sup>60</sup> By this time, the black servant boy was the ultimate exotic pet.

Children in general began to fill the space previously occupied by animals in toilette scenes, as they became more prominent in genre scenes and portraits.<sup>61</sup> In his study of the parrot in art, Richard Verdi argues that children are “in so many ways, the human equivalent of parrots.”<sup>62</sup> Returning to Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle*, we find the following catalogue of a parrot’s charms:

It entertains, it distracts, it amuses; in solitude it is company; in conversation it is an interlocutor, it responds, it calls, it welcomes, it emits peals of laughter, it expresses a tone of affection, it plays with the seriousness of a sentence; its little words tumble out at random, amusing us by their disparity, or sometimes surprising us by their justice.<sup>63</sup>

This description could easily apply to a small child. Eighteenth-century moralists and satirists were not kind to pet owners; Caraccioli, for example, saw both pet ownership and morning toilettes as symptoms of idleness and vanity, while the naturalist François Le Vaillant pitied monkeys who “languish in Europe, in slavery, fear, and boredom, or perish suffocated by the caresses of our women, or even poisoned by their candies.”<sup>64</sup> Mercier complained bitterly about ladies who lavished more affection on their dogs than their children, and fed their parrots better than they fed their servants. The presence of a child in toilette portraits—one’s own child rather than a status symbol of a servant—undercut this criticism; these women are good mothers as well as objects of desire.

Many toilette scenes and portraits depict mothers and young daughters<sup>65</sup>. In Chardin’s *The Morning Toilette*, the burning candle, the clock indicating five minutes to seven, and the missal lying on chair suggest that the mother and daughter are dressing to attend an early Mass.<sup>66</sup> Rather than a leisurely morning of pampering and gossip, Chardin aligns the toilette with the liturgical clock, with bourgeois virtue rather than aristocratic indolence. Jean-Marc Nattier’s portrait of Madame Marsollier and her

daughter captures the care with which the mother contemplates the effect of a feather for her daughter's hair, or a sprig of yellow flowers. (fig. 8) Just as these mothers fabricate their own femininity, they gently instruct the next generation in the secrets of the toilette; the artists' use of similar attire, coiffures, cosmetics, and gestures underlines the point. The cosseted child takes the place of the pampered pet. When imitative birds, monkeys, and elaborately dressed and coiffed dogs are also present in these images, they serve to displace any suggestion of "parroting" from the mother onto the daughter, defusing the toilette scene's traditional undercurrent of class tension. In Alexandre Roslin's *The First Ball*, a blue parrot perches on the back of the mother's chair. However, its position in front of the mirror—and opposite the daughter, whose dress and coiffure are trimmed in the same blue—suggests that it is reflecting the dutifully imitative daughter, not implicating an inappropriately aspirational mother.<sup>67</sup>

By the late 1780s, it is as common to see boys as girls depicted with their mothers; once again, this may be intended to defuse the morally suspect aspects of the toilette scene, offering a mere "parody of ... gallantry."<sup>68</sup> Instead of a voyeuristic man, we see an innocent boy, playing Cupid to his mother's Venus. Susan L. Siegfried has written of the lost Louis-Léopold Boilly painting *L'Enfant au fard* that it introduces "a double structure of male fantasy: on the one hand the male viewer can ogle the woman, and on the other identify with the little boy."<sup>69</sup> As the ritual of the toilette fell from fashion and out of public view, a victim of the new strictures against excessive luxury and self-indulgence, this fantasy must have been an increasingly common one. With their enormous Boilly eyes, both the mother and the tethered pug confront the viewer's gaze, as if surprised to find us intruding on what has become a private, domestic daily ritual.<sup>70</sup>

For toilettes and the imagery they had spawned were on their way out; the cataclysmic changes in society in the years just before and after the French Revolution rendered this onetime royal ritual an elitist relic. Indeed, makeup itself was seen as anathema to the "honest self-presentation" required for membership in "the fraternity of citizens."<sup>71</sup> Powder, wigs, and rouge branded their wearers as aristocrats, and suggested that they had something to hide. The instruments of the toilette had already begun to go underground in the 1770s, banished to dedicated *cabinets de toilette* and specialized furnishings and accessories equipped with built-in mirrors and cosmetics containers that could be hidden away easily when not in use. Luxury, exoticism, and eroticism—whether expressed through the refined rituals and objects of the toilette or the ownership of over-indulged pets—were no longer acceptable. The very concept of "nature" and "natural" changed, undermining the use of animals as signs of feminine artificiality.



**Figure 8.** Jean-Marc Nattier, *Portrait of Madame Marsollier and Her Daughter*, 1749, oil on canvas, 146.1 x 114.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 45.172.



Nature was no longer something to be dominated or domesticated; instead, it was celebrated as the opposite of tyranny. Whether animal or female, nature became synonymous with *liberté*—something that could not be fettered or fabricated in a lady's boudoir.

## NOTES

1. For a thorough discussion of the social history and material culture of the eighteenth-century toilette, see Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, "Dressing to Impress: The Morning Toilette and the Fabrication of Femininity," in Charissa Bremer-David, ed., *Paris: Life & Luxury in the Eighteenth Century* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 53–74. This essay expands upon select themes and objects discussed in that text.
2. See, for example, Christophe Huet, *The Lady of Quality at Her Toilette*, c. 1737, oil on panel, Château de Chantilly, and Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, "La Toilette," engraving, from *Essai de Papillonerie Humaines*, 1748.
3. For a description of the *lever* of Louis XIV, see Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires complets et authentiques du duc de Saint-Simon sur le siècle de Louis XIV et la régence* (Paris: Hachette, 1856–1858), 13: 88–89.
4. Glynis Ridley, "Introduction: Representing Animals," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies: Special issue on Animals in the Eighteenth Century* 33.4 (2010): 431–36, 432.
5. One correspondent of the 1760s, Geneviève de Malboissière, kept canaries, a goldfinch, and a capuchin monkey, all at the same time. See Geneviève de Malboissière, *Une Jeune fille au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: H. Champion, 1925), 122, 133–35.
6. Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 140–42.
7. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves*, 125–26.
8. Richard Verdi, *The Parrot in Art: From Durer to Elizabeth Butterworth* (London: Scala Publishers, 2007), 28.
9. Eccles. 10:20.
10. P. A. Le Beau after P.-A. Baudouin, *Sa taille est ravissante*, engraving, 1770. See Philip Stewart, *Engraven Desire: Eros, Image, and Text in the French Eighteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 88–90.
11. Morag Martin, *Selling Beauty: Cosmetics, Commerce, and French Society, 1750–1830* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 76.
12. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979), 6: 148–49.
13. Donald Posner, "The 'Duchesse de Velours' and Her Daughter: A Masterpiece by Nattier and its Historical Context," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 31 (1996): 131–41, 136.



14. Colin Jones, *Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress* exh. cat. (London: National Gallery Company and Yale University Press, 2003), 90.
15. See, for example, Antoine Vestier, *Petite fille tenant une poupée*, 1790, oil on canvas, 73 x 59 cm, Musée de l'Avallonnais, RF 1960–60.
16. Louis Petit de Bachaumont et al., eds., *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France* (London: John Adamson, 1780), 7: 165.
17. Baronne d'Oberkirch, *Mémoires de la baronne d'Oberkirch*, ed. Suzanne Burkard (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989), 74.
18. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves*, 126, 130.
19. Oberkirch, *Mémoires*, 216.
20. See Robbins, *Elephant Slaves*, 134–35, and *passim*.
21. Quoted in Robbins, *Elephant Slaves*, 143.
22. Nicole Garnier-Pelle et al., *The Monkeys of Christophe Huet*, trans. Sharon Grevet (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 10 and *passim*.
23. Garnier-Pelle et al., *The Monkeys of Christophe Huet*, 156–57.
24. Béatrice Salmon, "Preface," in Nicole Garnier-Pelle et al., *The Monkeys of Christophe Huet*, 10.
25. See Sarah R. Cohen, "Chardin's Fur: Painting, Materialism, and the Question of Animal Soul," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.1 (2004): 39–61, 49–51.
26. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves*, 146.
27. L.-A. de Caraccioli, *Le livre à la mode*, ed. Anne Richardot (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2005), 87.
28. See Melissa Hyde, "The 'Makeup' of the Marquise: Boucher's portrait of Pompadour at her toilette," *Art Bulletin* 82.3 (2000): 453–75, 458.
29. Martin, *Selling Beauty*, 19–21.
30. Ange Goudar, *L'Espion chinois: ou, L'envoyé secret de la cour de Pekin* (Cologne, 1765), 2: 104.
31. Lynn Festa, "Cosmetic Differences: The Changing Faces of England and France," in Catherine Ingrassia and Jeffrey Ravel, eds. *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 34 (2004): 25–54, 35–36.
32. Jones, *Madame de Pompadour*, 80.
33. François Boucher, *Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour*, oil on canvas, 81.2 x 64.9 cm, 1758, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. See Alden R. Gordon and Teri Hensick, "The picture within the picture: Boucher's 1750 portrait of Madame de Pompadour identified," *Apollo* 155.480 (February 2002): 21–30, and Hyde, "The 'Makeup' of the Marquise."
34. Denis Diderot et al., *L'Encyclopédie, ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1966), 14: 402.
35. Hyde, "The 'Makeup' of the Marquise," 458.
36. Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, "Pomade pour les levres," from *Livre des caricatures tant bonnes que mauvaises*, 1775, drawing, 18.9 cm x 13.4 cm, folio 329, inv. 675, Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (The National Trust). Saint-Aubin was not the only artist to depict Pompadour as a fashion-conscious monkey; see Garnier-Pelle et al., *The Monkeys of Christophe Huet*, 175.

37. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves*, 145.
38. François Boucher, *La Marchande de Modes*, oil on canvas, 64 x 53 cm, 1746, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, acc. no. NM 772.
39. François Boucher, *Lady Fastening Her Garter*, 1742, oil on canvas, 52.5 x 66.5 cm, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, inv. no. 58 (1967.4).
40. Nancy K. Miller, *French Dressing: Women, Men, and Ancien Régime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1995), 9.
41. Colin Bailey et al., *The Age of Watteau, Chardin and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, exh. cat. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2003), 222.
42. Alastair Laing et al., *François Boucher, 1703–1770*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 195.
43. Elisabeth Foucart-Walter and Pierre Rosenberg, *The Painted Cat: The cat in Western painting from the fifteenth to the twentieth century* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 122.
44. Foucart-Walter and Rosenberg, *The Painted Cat*, 20.
45. N. F. Lowe, “The Meaning of Venereal Disease in Hogarth’s Graphic Art,” in Linda E. Merians, ed., *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in eighteenth-century Britain and France* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 168–82, 176.
46. Robert Rosenblum, “From the Royal Hunt to the Taxidermist: A Dog’s History of Modern Art,” in Edgar Peters Bowron, Peter C. Sutton, et al., *Best in Show: The Dog in Art from the Renaissance to Today*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 39–100, 42.
47. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Broken Mirror*, 1763, oil on canvas, 56 x 45.6 cm, Wallace Collection, acc. no. P442.
48. James St. John, *Letters from France to a Gentleman in the South of Ireland ... written in 1787* (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1788), 1: 4.
49. Foucart-Walter and Rosenberg, *The Painted Cat*, 139.
50. Sigismond Freudeberg, *La Marchande de rubans*, oil on canvas, 44 x 36.5 cm, undated, Musée Cognacq-Jay, inv. no. 33; Claude d’Anthenaise et al., *Vies de Chiens* exh. cat. (Paris: Alain de Gourcuff/Masion de la Chasse & de la Nature, 2000), 67.
51. *Vies de Chiens*, “Athenaise et al.,” 88.
52. *The Macarony Dressing Room*, engraved by Charles White after Captain Minshull, published by Thomas Bowen, 1778, engraving, 25 x 35 cm, Lewis Walpole Library, call no. 772.11.09.01+.
53. See, for example, Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Chez le perruquier*, undated, drawing, 12.5 x 33.5 cm, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. 33362bis, and Jean Duplessi-Bertaux, *Interior of a barber’s shop*, 1747–1819, drawing, 5.7 x 8.3 cm, British Museum, reg. no. 1910,0212.87.
54. See Catherine Lanoë, *La poudre et le fard: Une histoire des cosmétiques de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris, 2008), *passim*, and Karl H. Dannenfeldt, “Europe Discovers Civet Cats and Civet,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 18.3 (1985): 403–31.

55. Tortoiseshell toilette set, Augsburg, 1710, Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, inv. nr. KOS 629–658.

56. *Casket (carré de toilette)*, French, ca. 1680–90, wood veneered with rosewood, brass, mother-of-pearl, pewter, copper, stained and painted horn; gilt-bronze mounts, 13 x 32.1 x 25.7 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, acc. no. 88.DA.111.

57. Mimi Hellman, “Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32.4 (Summer 1999): 415–45, 436.

58. Louis Petit de Bauchamont, et al., *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l’histoire de la république des lettres en France* (1762–89) (London: John Adamson, 1780), 17: 226.

59. *Porte-perruque en forme de perroquet*, Florsheim-am-Main, faience, 18th century, 75 cm, Musée Adrien Dubouché, Limoges, inv. no. ADL878.

60. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 6: 290–91.

61. Christine Kayser et al., *L’enfant chéri au siècle des Lumières* exh. cat. (Louveciennes: Musée-Promenade Marly-le-Roi, 2003), 89 and *passim*.

62. Verdi, *The Parrot in Art*, 23.

63. Comte de Buffon, “Le Perroquet,” *Histoire Naturelle* (1779), 6: 109–10, quoted in Robbins, *Elephant Slaves*, 129.

64. Quoted in Robbins, *Elephant Slaves*, 145.

65. See, for example, François-Hubert Drouais, *Family Portrait (Toilette)*, 1756, oil on canvas, 244 x 195 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., acc. no. 1946.7.4.

66. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *The Morning Toilette*, c. 1741, oil on canvas, 49 x 39 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, acc. no. NM 782; Colin Bailey et al., *The Age of Watteau, Chardin and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, exh. cat. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2003), 200.

67. Alexandre Roslin, *The First Ball*, 1755–1760, oil on panel, 98 x 81 cm, Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, inv. no. 42.14.

68. Susan L. Siegfried, *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly: Modern Life in Napoleonic France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 170.

69. Louis-Léopold Boilly, *L’enfant au fard*, undated, oil on canvas, 59 x 47.8 cm, location unknown. Pictured in Susan L. Siegfried, *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly*, 171.

70. A second dog sprawls on a stool—probably one specially designed for a dog’s use—beneath the toilette table. See *Vies de Chiens*, “Athenaise et al.,” 88–89.

71. Martin, *Selling Beauty*, 1.